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Top Headlines

Chosun Ilbo
ROKG to Reshuffle Six to Seven Ministries and Offices
before Lunar New Year's Day

JoongAng Ilbo
More Speedy and Specific Policy on Job Creation Needed

Dong-a Ilbo, Segye Ilbo
National Assembly Speaker Kim Not to Invoke Right
to Deliberate Bills until Jan. 8

Hankook Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun
Democratic Party Decides to End Sit-in at Rotunda Hall of National
Assembly Building

Hankyoreh Shinmun
National Assembly Speaker "Delays" Invoking Right
to Deliberate Bills... "Truce" Called
with Source of Discord Unresolved

Domestic Developments

1 The Program Management Consortium (PMC), which is overseeing the

relocation of U.S. military bases in the ROK to Pyeongtaek, submitted a final relocation proposal to the ROK and the U.S. at the end of last December. Under the proposal, the Yongsan Garrison in Seoul will be moved by the end of 2014 and the 2nd Infantry Division in northern Gyeonggi Province by the first half of 2016. (Dong-a, Chosun)

2 ROK President Lee's diplomatic advisory team, including former Foreign Minister Han Seung-joo and Presidential Adviser for External Strategy Kim Tae-hyo, will visit the U.S. on Jan. 7 to meet with Korean Peninsula experts of U.S. think tanks and officials of U.S. President-elect Obama. (Hankyoreh)

International News

1 The Korean Central News Agency said that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, in his first official activity of the year, has inspected the "Guard Seoul Ryu Kyong-su Tank Division 105." (Dong-a, Hankyoreh, Seoul)

2 Radio Free Asia reported on Jan. 3 that the number of North Korean defectors crossing into Thailand has surged in the last two months. (Dong-a)

3 Gordon Johndroe, Spokesman for the National Security Council, urged North Korea to accept the nuclear verification protocol, saying in a daily press briefing, "We think the Six-Party process has worked well." (Segye)

Media Analysis

Middle East/the Israeli-Palestine Conflict

All newspapers gave front-page coverage to Israel's siege of Gaza City. Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo reported that Israel pushed for ground warfare before the international community's intervention so that it may bring Hamas under its control and raise its stakes in negotiations over a truce. The newspaper also carried an inside-page story headlined: "EU Urges Ceasefire... Countries across Europe Denounces Israel." Conservative Dong-a Ilbo reported that Israeli ground forces seized most of the areas of northern Gaza, and the UN Security Council failed to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire. Conservative Chosun Ilbo, in an inside-page story, quoted President Bush as saying in his January 3 radio address, "This recent outburst of violence was instigated by Hamas," and it also quoted Israeli military commanders as saying, "This operation will be completed in three or four weeks." Left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun reported that the U.S. is indirectly supporting Israel's Middle East strategy by objecting to the UN Security resolution on a ceasefire. The newspaper's inside-page headline read: "'David' Tougher Than 'Goliath'... No One Knows Who Will Win."

JoongAng Ilbo editorialized: "The U.S. should clarify its position on an immediate and unconditional cease-fire. The UN Security Council held an emergency meeting last Saturday but failed to release a statement calling for an immediate cease-fire, as the U.S. was insisting that Hamas should stop their rocket attacks before agreeing on a cease-fire. The U.K., Germany and Japan, the U.S.'s traditional allies, have not clarified their official positions, while European countries as well as Arab nations are censuring the Israeli invasion. If the global community is divided over such an intense conflict, we will never stop the gunfire in the Gaza Strip."

Hankyoreh Shinmun editorialized: The U.S. is also heavily responsible (for the current situation in the Middle East.) As a nation which has provided huge military assistance to Israel, the U.S. was practically the only nation in the world that supported Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip. In fact, this attack is similar to the attack by the George W. Bush administration on Iraq. It is not too much to say that the Bush administration, which failed to learn anything from the Iraq war, incited Israel to stage war.

North Korea

Dong-a Ilbo and Hankyoreh Shinmun replayed a report by the Korean Central News Agency that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, in his first official activity of the year, has inspected the "Guard Seoul Ryu Kyong-su Tank Division 105."

Opinions/Editorials

Global Response to Gaza
(JoongAng Ilbo, January 5, 2009, Page 26)

As the Palestinian paramilitary and political group Hamas and Israel continue to wage their bloody struggle, the global community is smelling the stench of blood while welcoming in the new year. More than 500 people in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip were killed by Israel's onslaught last week, which resulted in a large number of civilian casualties, including the death of 80 children.

The number of casualties is expected to snowball as Israel decided to launch a massive aerial bombardment Saturday, the eighth day of aerial attacks, before launching any ground attacks. The global community as well as the United Nations and the European Union expressed their deep concern that Israel is poised to launch a major ground offensive into Gaza, which will pose a serious threat to the safety of civilians, and have called for an immediate cease-fire.

There cannot be a strong enough reason to go to war, when the war kills and maims innocent people indiscriminately. Israel and Hamas should accept the recommendation of the international community and cease all military actions.

Unfortunately, both sides are not prepared to obediently accept the cease-fire plan. Israel is on the lookout for an opportunity to strike a devastating blow against Hamas' rocket launching facility that has traumatized southern Israel. It seems intent on destroying Hamas this time, as it prepares all that is necessary to wage a long-term war by mobilizing a huge number of reserve units.

In like manner, Hamas is showing its fighting spirit, saying, "We will make Gaza a tomb for Israeli soldiers." They don't seem genuinely worried about the dangers to innocent civilians, including children. Instead, Israel criticized Hamas, "Stop using civilians as human shields."

It is high time that the global community actively engages itself in an effort to stop more human sacrifices. The U.S. should clarify its position on an immediate and unconditional cease-fire. The UN Security Council held an emergency meeting last Saturday but failed to release a statement calling for an immediate cease-fire, as the U.S. was insisting that Hamas should stop their rocket attacks before agreeing on a cease-fire.

The U.K., Germany and Japan, America's traditional allies, have not clarified their official positions, while European countries as well as Arab nations are censuring the Israeli invasion. If the global community is divided over such an intense conflict, we will never put an end to the violence and bloodshed in the Gaza Strip.

* This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.

If ROK-U.S. Alliance is Strong, We Do Not Need to Be Afraid of
Pyongyang's Strategy of Engaging with the U.S. and Sidelining ROK
(Chosun Ilbo, January 3, 2009, Page 27)

This year, the most important task for the ROK's foreign and security policy is to build a partnership with the incoming Obama administration. Right after its launch on January 20, the Obama administration will take a comprehensive look at U.S. policies on the Korean Peninsula, including the North Korean nuclear issue. In this process, it is important that the ROK makes its voice heard correctly. To this end, Seoul should first adjust its strategies and initiatives regarding the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance, contingencies in North Korea, including the nuclear problem, and global efforts to overcome the economic crisis and fight terrorism.

As long as cooperation between the ROK and the U.S. goes smoothly, direct dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea will serve as a breakthrough in the year-long stalemate of the Six-Party Talks. Thus, we do not need to block it. If we are anxious about speedy progress on U.S.-North Korea relations and hasten to open up the

door for inter-Korean ties, we would fall into the trap set by the North. If the principle is clear that the ROK and the U.S. are equal partners in dealing with the North Korean situation, and if that principle is certainly put into action, Seoul has no reason to worry about the division of roles between the ROK and the U.S. in the process of dialogue.

ROK and U.S. Fail to Round off Bush's Tenure with Secretary

Rice's Visit to Seoul

(Chosun Ilbo, January 5, 2009, Page 3)

By Washington Correspondent Lee Ha-won

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was originally scheduled to visit Seoul this week. Before resigning on January 19, together with U.S. President George W. Bush, she had planned to meet with the ROK Foreign Minister during her "farewell visit" to Northeast Asia.

On January 4, however, Secretary Rice canceled her trip to the ROK and Japan and decided to visit only China, which has recently marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties with Washington. The ostensible reason is that she cannot afford to do so because the Middle East conflict is being aggravated by Israeli ground forces pouring into Gaza. With over 400 casualties of this conflict weighing heavily on the U.S., the cancellation of her trip to Seoul is understandable in a way.

The concern is that, unlike the case with Tokyo, Seoul and Washington have cancelled their foreign ministerial talks for the second consecutive month.

The U.S.-ROK ministerial-level strategic consultation was slated for December 8, 2008 in Washington D.C. But Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Yu Myung-hwan cancelled his visit to the U.S. at the last minute. The Korean government reportedly calculated that the ROK didn't have to take the initiative in meeting the outgoing Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. She must have gotten a hint of what was going on inside the ROK government. Accordingly, the Secretary of State could cancel her visit to the ROK without any pressure, citing the recent developments in the Middle East.

Condoleezza Rice will return to Stanford University as a professor, but she will play a vital role in formulating the diplomatic policy of the Republican Party whose aims are to reclaim the White House in the 2012 Presidential election. As Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State during the Clinton Administration, still remains influential, Condoleezza Rice is forecast to become the "Albright of the Republican Party."

Given that, the Korean government cannot neglect the role of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. I am afraid that the Korean government was not successful in putting the finishing touches on the relationship with the outgoing Secretary of State.

Massacre and Peace Are Incompatible

(Hankyoreh Shinmun, January 5, 2009, Page 27)

Israel launched a land invasion of the Gaza Strip on Saturday. This shows that the conflict has entered a new phase of massacres by an Israel armed with overwhelming military power. Israel's onslaught has killed more than 500 Palestinians, and wounded more than 2,000 in the Gaza Strip since December 27.

Israel declared that the aim of its incursion lies in preventing Hamas from committing hostile acts against Israel. This indicates Israel's intention to reoccupy the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, as regaining control of the region is the only way to neutralize support for Hamas supported by most of its residents. With the number of Palestinian casualties growing, Muslim countries will see their anti-Israel sentiment deepening. Given that, Israel is sowing the seeds of hatred.

In a statement announced after the land invasion, Israel described itself as a 'peace pursuer.' This does not make any sense. No country is entitled to unilaterally invade the territory of other nations in order to resolve small conflicts in a border region. Israel also made an incursion into southern Lebanon to attack

Hezbollah guerillas in 2006, leaving many people wounded or dead, ultimately complicating the situation in the Middle East. This shows that massacre and peace are incompatible.

The U.S. is also heavily responsible for the current situation in the Middle East. As a nation which has provided huge military assistance to Israel, the U.S. was practically the only nation in the world that supported Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip. In fact, this attack is similar to the attack on Iraq by the George W. Bush administration. It is not too farfetched to say that the Bush administration, which failed to learn anything from the Iraq war, incited Israel to wage war.

Israel hinted that the Gaza Strip will see the invasion last for a protracted period of time. The international community should not tolerate this. It should put pressure on Israel to immediately withdraw its troops from the Gaza Strip and join the international efforts to restore peace in the region. The incoming Barack Obama administration should take a lead in resolving the conflict. Israel has to witness an outburst of rage by the global community against the invasion.

Features

US Forces in Korea to Complete Relocation by 2016
(Dong-a Ilbo, January 5, 2009, Front Page)

The Program Management Consortium, which is overseeing the relocation of U.S. military bases in Korea to Pyeongtaek, has submitted a final proposal to move the Yongsan Garrison in Seoul by the end of 2014 and the 2nd Infantry Division in northern Gyeonggi Province by the first half of 2016.

The consortium submitted the proposal at the end of last year. Under the plan, the 8th U.S. Army within the Yongsan Garrison will be relocated by the first half of 2013. The U.S. Korea Command, to be established around 2011 following the transfer of wartime operational control to Seoul, will move to the Pyeongtaek area by the first half of 2014. Other facilities are scheduled for transfer by the end of 2014.

In addition, relocation of the command post of the 2nd Infantry Division and its military units will occur between 2013 and the first half of 2016.

Despite Korea's demand to complete the relocation by 2014, the United States postponed the deadline to 2016 citing budget and technical issues. In response, the Korean Defense Ministry said the specific relocation timeline and cost will be released after coordination with its counterpart based on the consortium's final proposal.

A military source said, "Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee and U.S. Forces Korea Commander Walter Sharp will reach an agreement on the relocation plan based on the consortium's final proposal within this month."

* This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.

Stephens